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DECORATION & FURNITURE

DRAWING-ROOM FASHIONS.



By no means follows because a lady's drawing-room is not arranged and decorated in the height of the prevailing fashion that she is not possessed of good artistic taste. The charm of old associations is often more powerful than that of mere novelty.

We must agree, however, with a prominent English newspaper authority on such subjects, that the fashions of to-day are, in general at least, "more artistic and beautiful than were those of yesterday." Take, for instance, says this journal, a drawing-room timepiece; it is no longer considered the thing to display on the centre of a mantelpiece a large gaudy, ornate, ormolu clock, surmounted by a long-legged nymph pouring gilded water from an overturned pitcher, preserved from the dust or the flies by a still larger glass shade. These French clocks, which were often fancied as wedding presents, are now never seen in a well-arranged fashionable drawing-room, and have departed to other regions in company with the cut-glass lustres and the alabaster statuettes under glass shades, by which the timepiece was supported on either side, and which formed the only ornaments of the mantelpiece. These heavy, cumbrous articles are now replaced by anything quaint, original, pretty, or beautiful in the way of Dresden or Chelsea china, Wedgwood or Minton wares, Worcester or Japanese, anything antique, or anything modern; but whatever the ornament, whether large or small, it is never placed under a glass shade, but stands on the velvet mantelboard, and it is not by any means necessary that these ornaments should go in pairs.

The best mantelboards are straight ones, with a deep border of lace, and nails and fringe are out of date. Heavy gold-framed mantelpiece mirrors, topped with a heavy cornice, are not purchased to-day; and those ladies who can discard them either modify the frames to a small gold beading or velvet band, so as not to attract the eye, or, when the rooms are not very large and lofty, oval or octagon-shaped mirrors are preferred in velvet or china frames or Venetian mirrors. Plate-glass mirrors from ceiling to floor are now very little in request in ordinary-sized drawing-rooms; and, indeed, large pier-glasses have rather gone out of fashion than not. It is left to the Parisian hotels to glitter and reflect from their many mirrors.

Fender-stools are considered to be very low, and are inadmissible in a fashionable drawing-room. Hearth-rugs, with full-blown colored flowers or any kind of pattern, are replaced by Persian or sheepskin rugs; black, white, or colored are equally fancied. When the drawing-room floor is a parquet one, it is covered by a variety of these rugs placed about the floor; others have a square carpet in the middle of the room, with only a parquet border. As the heavy cornices are discarded over the mantelpiece mirrors, so are they equally discarded, when possible, over the windows, or reduced to the smallest proportions in the matter of gilding; draperies, or the severe Queen Anne style, being the prevailing mode.

It is now quite a feature to ornament the panels of the drawing-room doors with pictures painted for the purpose and let in under glass, so that the door presents a level surface, the panels being thus filled up; or the panels of the doors are painted with floral designs, and the beadings are painted black, red, blue, or gold to harmonize with the style of decoration.

Some adopt the plan of placing a shelf for china ornaments and china jars at the top of the drawing-room door inside the room. Handsome jars of every description of china are placed upon massive brackets at a considerable height on the walls, so that the jars are but a few inches from the cornice of the ceiling. The much-sought-for blue china jars on red brackets

have a good effect. The supports of the mantelpieces are often panelled in the same way as are the doors, and some even panel the shutters of the windows and the walls on either side of the glasses with floral designs, interspersed with birds or arabesques. When the glasses have narrow bead frames, or when the glasses are let into the walls in small recesses for the purpose, this panelling looks remarkably well.

Drawing-room chairs (uniform in make and covering), usually of walnut-wood, are no longer the fancy of the hour, and the predilection is for low chairs, spring chairs, divan chairs, wooden chairs, cane chairs, Louis Quatorze chairs, Chippendale chairs, Queen Anne chairs, kitchen chairs, Windsor chairs—in fact, every kind of chair. The Windsor and kitchen chairs are rendered acceptable in the drawing-room by being painted black and relieved and touched up with gold, and little cushions covered with some thick pretty material are placed on the seats. Gentlemen are rather partial to these substantial-looking chairs when not inclined for one very low, very fragile, or luxurious. Sofas, ottomans, and settees are not covered "en suite" as heretofore, except in large rooms which are used for receptions only, when the family lives principally in boudoirs and morning-rooms. Fancy coverings are mostly preferred, whether costly or inexpensive, stuff or cretonne, dark blue with a crimson border, dark claret with a light green border, dark green with a cream and green border; but nothing incongruous in the way of coloring or covering is introduced. There is one prevailing tone, and all other colors introduced either blend well or contrast well with it. In cretonnes and chintzes for loose cases, again, the idea is variety rather than uniformity, but it is not now the custom to have all the drawing-room chairs and sofas covered in loose chintz or cretonne cases; these covers are rather put on when the family is out of town. When washing materials are used, small patterns are chosen in preference to large, flowery ones, and the same remark applies to carpets, which cannot be of too unobtrusive a character. Some people fancy whole-colored carpets, blues or grays or greens, without any pattern whatever.

Folding screens are a great feature in the drawing-rooms of to-day. They cut off the corners and fill up the angles of rooms, and form a good medium for the display of china and photographs. Among the latest fancies of the day are the bird-screens; storks, wild ducks, and flamingoes are painted at the base of the screens among grasses and tangled weeds on a gold ground; on the upper part of the screens are painted smaller birds, with bright plumage; and leaves and stalks of pampas and other long grasses are painted on one side only—the hinge side, that is to say. Other screens are painted in panels with birds, fruit, and flowers; others are covered in velvets and foreign-looking fabrics or satin, with gold beading; on these screens innumerable photographs are hung, and china plates and small velvet brackets with ornaments of china. Wicker screens, which are placed at the back of writing-tables and other convenient spots, are also ornamented with brackets for holding flowers; sometimes these screens are covered with ivy, and have a tray for flowers.

In the arrangement of the furniture, tables are never placed in the centres of the rooms, but about them at convenient corners or spots. Pianos, when they are not grand, but have backs that require covering, do not stand with these backs against the wall, but the reverse way, the back facing the room across one corner of it, and many are the devices resorted to for rendering these backs pretty and ornamental. Velvet and satin, trimmed with lace, are employed for this purpose, upon which china plates, knick-knacks, and photographs are hung. Cretonne looks well arranged in this manner, with a table covered in velvet standing against it, as some ladies complain that velvet rather muffles the tone of the piano, and prefer something lighter.

It is not considered necessary that the curtains

should match the coverings of the furniture of the rooms; indeed, it is in better taste when they do not, as it affords more variety to the eye, the one great thing to be achieved is harmony in place of monotony, agreeable contrasts instead of dreary sameness. The most fashionable curtains are those that have an originality about them, whether of silk, woollen, or cotton texture. Wealthy people indulge in antique brocades, and in new brocades both of oriental Chinese, Japanese, and Indian manufacture; people less wealthy invest in pretty woollen materials, with curious patterns and subdued colors; or in cretonnes or whole-colored curtains of cotton materials, arranged with a contrasting border; but the things to be avoided in the way of curtains are the stereotyped plain or striped reps and damasks, with ubiquitous border to match.

Every variety of stuff is indulged in for portières, from satin, silk, and velvet to homespun, with linings from China crêpe to cotton. Curtains of lace are often added and placed inside these portière curtains, but no one possessing any idea of the fitness of things would have curtains of lace or muslin unsupported by something more substantial. Portières are made a great feature in some drawing-rooms, and when lofty enough to admit of it, they are finished with handsome valances, hand-painted on silk or beautifully worked in silk. Unused doors are usually draped with curtains of brocade so that the door is not visible, and for the sake of symmetry a corresponding rod and curtains are arranged at a given distance, either on the same or opposite wall.

NOVEL DINNER-TABLE DECORATIONS.

SOME novel decorations at the dinner-table of an English country-house are noticed by a writer in the London Queen. At intervals down the sides of the table one night were placed low, antique brass candlesticks upon small ovals of silvered plate-glass, and surrounded by garlands of maidenhair. Between each of these was a low vase containing one or two flowers of the yellow allamanda, a scarlet geranium, and a good deal of maidenhair. Trails of the fern, geranium, and allamanda, laid on the white cloth, led from each candlestick to the centre of the table, where was an épergne, arranged with allamanda, eucharis, geranium, and various ferns. At each end of the table was a yellow croton in a large brass jardinière. The effect of the scarlet and yellow with the brass ornaments is described as particularly striking, and all was so simply done that the writer thinks that any one might reproduce the effect with very little trouble. Most houses have some brass suitable for the purpose, and any pale yellow and scarlet flowers would do nearly as well as those mentioned. Another evening the table was literally covered with china ornaments. Two large Amstel baskets were at each end of the table, filled with fruit and flowers, tastefully arranged together; and down each side were lovely Dresden figures alternately upright and reclining, each with a basket, which was filled with flowers, the lines being broken half-way down by two large Dresden open-work baskets, with the same arrangement of flowers. A magnificent Dresden centre-piece in the middle was surrounded by small Berlin figures holding china shells full of bonbons and comfits; trails of fern on the cloth joined each piece of china, and tendrils stretched to all parts of the table from a beautiful Dresden candelabrum suspended from the ceiling over the centre-piece. Of course, it is not given to everyone to possess so much cabinet china that they can use it for the dining-room without its absence from its usual place being noticed. No special arrangement of flowers was used in this design, except that all were stove blossoms of the rarer kind; but for this very reason particular care and taste were required for the grouping of the colors. A trellis-work all over the